
Memorandum for:

The attached memorandum was prepared

for Peter Sommer (NSC Staff)
per his request. 25X1

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Office of European Analysis
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MEMORANDUM

The role of King Juan Carlos in Spanish politics

King Juan Carlos continues to be a key factor in the stability of democratic political institutions in Spain. During the transition to democracy of 1975-1978, he was called "the motor of change" -- the man whose behind-the-scenes influence ensured the peaceful dissolution of the Franco system and the creation of representative institutions. The King's legal powers were considerably reduced by the 1978 democratic Constitution. He possesses the prerogatives of most constitutional monarchs: the authority to sanction and promulgate laws, convoke and dissolve parliament, and to propose or withdraw confidence in the Prime Minister. []

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Juan Carlos is also -- and most importantly -- the supreme commander of the armed forces. It is in this latter capacity that he retains important de facto influence. Many senior officers believe that their ultimate duty is to Spain and the Monarchy, not to the Constitution or the head of the government. The King maintains frequent and close personal contact with top military leaders and is attuned to their concerns. He has often acted as a "lightning rod" for military discontent over terrorism and a perceived decline in respect for national symbols, steering the officer corps away from interference in politics. When this tactic has failed -- as during the abortive coup attempt of 23 February 1981 -- the King has not hesitated to exercise in public his prestige and authority, calling the military to order and explicitly associating the Crown with the preservation of democracy. []

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Since the Socialists came to power in October 1982 the King's function of reassuring the military has, ironically, declined in importance. Despite the generals' suspicions of a leftist government, they have come to view Prime Minister Gonzalez with grudging respect. His tough anti-terrorist measures, frequent public praise for the police and the armed forces, and close attention to the professional needs and aspirations of the military have been well received in the barracks. This has enabled the King to function more as a "normal" constitutional monarch, concerned primarily with ceremonial duties and keeping above the political fray. []

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In our view the King exerts some influence over the Prime Minister's thinking. He meets with Gonzalez weekly, and they are known to focus largely on substantive matters of government policy.

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